

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, the House of Representatives failed pass a bipartisan amendment to the Commerce –Justice-Science Appropriations Act (the Act) which would have cut all funding to the misguided National Marine Fisheries Service biological opinion on the Delta by a narrow vote of 208 to 218. Congressman Jim Costa (D-Fresno) voted in favor of the amendment. If passed later this afternoon, the Act would move onto the Senate for consideration.

“I’m fighting for farmers, farm workers, and our Valley. The National Marine Fisheries Service biological opinion released earlier this month is flawed, and will continue to hurt our Valley’s farmers and farm workers,” said Costa. “Overall, the biological opinion left out the numerous other stressors affecting the health of the Delta. Congressman Devin Nunes (R-Tulare) offered a bipartisan amendment, with support from Congressman Cardoza’s and me, to the CJS Appropriations bill which would have forbid funds in the bill to implement the biological opinion. I supported the amendment, but a much larger effort is needed to solve our water problems.”

The opinion stated that the current pumping operations in the Central Valley Project and the California State Water Project should be changed to increase the long-term survival of winter and spring-run Chinook salmon, steelhead, the North American green sturgeon and Southern Resident killer whales. The whales rely on Chinook salmon runs for food.

Recommended changes in water operations will drastically impact the available annual water moved by the federal and state pumps, estimated to be around 330,000 acre feet per year. These changes come on top of water cuts to Valley farmers and cities this year, which have had major negative impacts on the San Joaquin Valley’s economy.

“In my view, if left unchanged, this biological opinion’s impact to water availability this Fall and next year in our Valley and Southern California is significantly underestimated,” concluded Costa.

Dr. Ian Fleming stated in a peer review of the biological opinion that some of the analyses would “benefit from more explicit attention” which includes “the additive nature of stressors and non-linear responses”. Costa strongly believes this includes the major other factors that are contributing to the decline of Delta health.